

## 2003 Session Review



**Bob**  
**McCaslin**  
Washington State Senator • 4th Legislative District

Dear neighbors,

The 2003 Legislature is now adjourned for the year. I'm glad to report that this was one of the most productive legislative sessions in recent memory.

The Senate led the way with the passage of a state-operating budget that includes no general tax increases. A new capital construction budget and passage of a prescription drug reform plan were two other major accomplishments this session.

In this newsletter I want to provide you with an overview of what was accomplished by the Legislature. I hope you'll send along comments and questions on these or any other issues related to state government.

It is truly an honor to serve as your senator in Olympia.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Bob McCaslin".

Sen. Bob McCaslin

### How to contact me:

**Olympia office address:**

112 Irv Newhouse  
Building

**Mailing address:**

PO Box 40404  
Olympia, WA 98504-0404

**Phone:** (360) 786-7606

**E-mail:**

mccaslin\_bo@leg.wa.gov

**Toll-free Legislative**

**Hotline:**

1-800-562-6000

**TTY:** 1-800-635-9993

**Internet information:**

www.leg.wa.gov

### Committees

- Judiciary, Chairman
- Government Operations & Elections
- Land Use & Planning



### In this newsletter...

- » **2003-05 No New Taxes Budget**
- » **Capital Projects**
- » **Prescription Drug Reform**
- » **4th District Transportation Projects**

## 2003 Session Review

### 2003-05 Operating Budget - No New Taxes

Entering the 2003 legislative session, it was clear that the budget would be an issue to loom over the state all year. Due to our stagnant economy, and poor budgeting decisions made by the Democrat majorities of the previous year, the Legislature came to Olympia facing a \$2.6 billion budget deficit.

Many at the time predicted there would be no way for the Legislature to solve this problem without raising taxes. The Senate Republicans didn't agree. Following the model introduced by the governor, we created a budget that preserved essential state services without raising taxes. How was it done? It was done the same way you at home face a budget crisis—through prioritized spending and reductions where appropriate.

It had been clear the past few years that Washington's voters wanted to see government do more with the money we already have. This is a budget that does that. Some hard choices had to be made, but I hope you'll agree that this was the best we could hope for in this economic climate.

A large tax increase would have further delayed economic recovery in Washington state.

Some of the key points in the budget approved by the Legislature include:

- No new general taxes;
- \$300 million in reserves for future downturns;
- A salary increase for teachers in their first seven years of service so no teacher will make less than \$30,000 by the end of 2004;
- Increased funding for K-12 class size reduction efforts from \$212 to \$254 per student;
- 400 new enrollments in four-year colleges for community college transfer students;
- \$7.5 million in additional funds for the two-year high-demand pool for worker retraining;
- A 75-cent pay increase for home health care workers;
- Restoration of funding cuts proposed by the governor that would have affected our most vulnerable citizens, including:
  - Programs for people with developmental disabilities and mental illnesses;



- Adult vision and hearing assistance programs;
- Nursing home quality maintenance fees; and
- Troubled youth services.

While we were able to pass a budget without raising taxes, tough times are still ahead. State revenues are projected to fall again by \$150 million, which makes our reserve funds even more necessary. Senate Republicans are committed to continuing this common sense approach to budgeting during these tough times.

### Capital budget brings projects to 4th District

The passage of a \$2.6 billion capital budget was another victory for the Legislature this session. With interest rates at the lowest point many of us can remember in our lifetimes, it made sense for the state to take the opportunity now to borrow money at such a cheap rate. This will allow us to make critical improvements to our state's

infrastructure and higher and public education systems.

The construction of these projects will also add over 14,000 jobs to the state's economic workforce. The addition of these family wage jobs should help reduce Washington's high rate of unemployment, while also jump-starting our economy.

Projects in the 4th District include:

- Spokane Crime Laboratory construction—\$11,365,000
- Spokane River land acquisition—\$1,073,188
- Department of Fish and Wildlife Regional Center at Mirabeau Point—\$3,900,000

## Tort reform legislation dies in House

Another factor driving up the cost of health care is the increasing liability costs for medical malpractice insurance. The astoundingly high increases in these costs are driving many small medical practices out of towns across the state.

As a result, the Senate Republicans introduced legislation this session to address the medical malpractice problem and reform our state's tort system. Three days of compelling testimony in the Senate Judiciary Committee made it clear changes are needed. I was proud to co-sponsor the Liability Reform Act of 2003.

This act addressed many parts of the state tort system. It eliminated a "joint and several liability" rule that often burdens a party who is 10 percent at fault but is made to pay 100 percent of the judgment. This often happens in lawsuits against the state, in cases where the state has a limited amount of fault, but serves as the "deep pockets" in a lawsuit.

The act also placed a cap on non-economic damages in medical malpractice cases. While there would continue to be no cap on economic damages, i.e. lost wages, non-economic damages, or "pain and suffering," would be limited to \$350,000.

These emotion-based awards often have no yardstick for comparison, and vastly drive up the cost of liability insurance. Changes would also be made in construction liability and government liability.

While this act passed with a bipartisan vote in the Senate, it landed with a large thud in the House Judiciary Committee. The powerful trial lawyer lobby, which has no interest in limiting damages, was able to kill the bill in the Democratically controlled committee. While liability reform didn't pass this year, Senate Republicans will continue to work toward a successful passage in the future.

## Prescription Drug Reform to benefit seniors

It's estimated that seniors spend an average of \$2,150 a year for prescription drugs. As costs continue to rise, it becomes clearer that seniors are finding it harder and harder to afford the medicines they need. Prescription drug reform has been an issue for the past few years, but this year we finally passed a plan that I was proud to vote for. This reform should help ease some of the pain felt by seniors when they pay for their prescription. Further reforms from the federal government will also be needed for effective long-term reform.

The intent of Senate Bill 6088 is to make prescription drugs more affordable for senior citizens and low-income persons with disabilities. The bill has two main parts.

### ***Medicaid Prescription Drug Benefit Program:***

- The bill directs the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) to create a Medicaid-style program for seniors over the age of 65 and disabled adults who are under 200 percent of the federal poverty level.
- This will make coverage available for citizens who might not qualify for federal Medicaid programs.
- DSHS will recommend financing options for the program to the Legislature later this year.

### ***Prescription Drug Discount Program:***

- Under this part of the plan, the Health Care Authority (HCA) will now negotiate price discounts for Washington

residents 50 and older or disabled with income levels up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level and lacking prescription drug coverage.

- The HCA will also create a "Pharmacy Connection" program that will educate seniors and others about existing manufacturer-sponsored prescription drug assistance programs. More details on these programs will become available as they are implemented.

While these changes are a good first step, I will continue to support further reforms to make prescription drugs more affordable.



## 4th District “Nickel Fund” Transportation Projects

### **North Spokane Corridor— Francis Ave. to Farwell Rd.— \$108.3 million.**

This project will improve mobility and increase capacity by constructing a segment of the North Spokane Corridor (NSC) for a four-lane divided highway from the Francis/Freya Interchange to the Park-Smith Road Interchange. A pedestrian/bike path will be constructed through this segment, as well as a park and ride facility at Freya/Wilding Street. This project is slated to begin by the end of 2003.

### **North Spokane Corridor— US 2 to Wandermere and US 2 Lowering—\$80.7 million.**

This 1.71-mile project on US 395 in Spokane will improve mobility and increase capacity by constructing a segment of the North Spokane Corridor (NSC) for four lanes of divided highway northbound and southbound from US 2 to Wandermere. This project is scheduled to begin in 2008.

### **I-90—Build lanes from Argonne to Sullivan Road— \$34.2 million.**

Constructs one additional lane in each direction from Argonne Road to Sullivan Road in the Spokane Valley. The project will improve traffic flow and reduce congestion. There are currently four lanes, and there will be six lanes when completed. This project is scheduled to begin by the end of 2003.

### **I-90—Sullivan Road-State Line median barrier—\$1.0 million.**

This project will install 7 miles of Cable Median Barrier in an effort to prevent errant vehicles from crossing the median.

## Federal “Do Not Call List” will soon be in operation

Tired of those telemarketing calls? The Federal Trade Commission (the nation’s consumer protection agency) and the states will begin enforcing the National Do Not Call Registry on Oct. 1, 2003. That’s when consumers who put their phone numbers on the registry by August 31, 2003 will notice a downturn in their telemarketing

calls. If you would like to add your name to the list, you can register online at [www.donotcall.gov](http://www.donotcall.gov). Placing your number on the registry will stop most, but not all telemarketing calls. Non-profits and charities are still allowed to call. Also, any business that has a relationship with you may continue to call, like your bank or credit card

company. For more information visit the Federal Trade Commission’s Web site at: [www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/edcams/donotcall/index.html](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/conline/edcams/donotcall/index.html) or call 1-888-382-1222.



PO Box 40404 • Olympia, WA 98504-0404

**McCasin**  
Bob  
Washington State Senator • 4th Legislative District

PSRST STD  
U.S. POSTAGE PAID  
OLYMPIA, WA  
PERMIT #133